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AUTHOR Fyans, Leslie J., Jr.
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ABSTRACT

The research described in this paper was generated by the presupposition that cultural ethnocentrism is a source of error in the scientific analysis of achievement. In order to examine the relationship between culture and competence, and the effect of culture on achievement, a study was undertaken of family behaviors that could be predictive of causal attributions of competence in Oriental, Indian, Hispanic, black, and white children. Family behavioral data collected include in-home reading, use of public library, sense of competence, parental communication, and family density. Attributions of academic success include effort, luck, and ability. The results of the study are presented in two sets of tables, the first providing within ethnic group regression data for fourth, eighth, and eleventh grade students and the second providing the results of discriminate analyses between attributional groups. It was found that: (1) origins of attributions varied by ethnic group membership, though consequents of particular attributions appear consistent across ethnic groups: (2) sex differences and perceptions of competence were differentially predictive of internal attributions for different ethnic groups: (3) motivated behavior activities were not predictive: and (4) family density did not mediate attributional patterns. (Author/GC)

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ORIGINS, CONSEQUENTS, AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMPETENCE OF MINORITY STUDENTS

Leslie J. Fyans, Jr., Ph.D.
Department of Planning and Research
Illinois State Board of Education

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More than thirty years have elapsed since the first examination of achievement motivation behavior began. During that time, many different facets of the achievement process have been investigated. In particular, the effect of culture upon achievement has been a major point of inquiry. Several different approaches have been used to study the effect of culture upon achievement. These include the McClelland perspective (1961, 1969), Weiner's attributional model (Weiner & Peter, 1973), and Maehr's contextual approach (Maehr, 1979). This present research was generated by the Maehr method, pre-supposing that one of the greatest sources of error in the scientific analysis of achievement is cultural ethnocentrism. That is, if the antecedents and consequents of the achievement behavior are not evaluated within its own context, the chances for successful inference are moot. Furthermore, recent data (Fyans, Salili, and Maehr, 1980) indicate that causal attributions themselves are processes which need to be better understood from cross-cultural perspectives. Finally, this present research attempted to "get a handle" on familial behavioral data which could be predictive of attributions and achievement. It was felt this latter data would afford a close look at the types of opportunities available for competence.

Since 1978, a collaborative team of researchers from the University of Illinois and the Illinois State Board of Education (Maehr, Fyans, Linn, Hill, Kerins, Hastings, Brennan) have attempted an indepth study of the relationship between culture and competence. The results to be presented here come in part from that collaborative effort.

The results to be presented focus upon two key sources of data:

(a) within group (ethnic groups) regressions of attribution upon certain behavioral and psychological variables;
(b) within ethnic group discriminate analyses between attributional groups.

Tables 1, 2, & 3 present the within group regression results for fourth, eighth, and eleventh grade students respectively.

The standardized Beta weights shown in Tables 1, 2, & 3 indicate the relative importance of the variables in predicting student attributions (scaled: ability = 4, effort = 3, task difficulty = 2, luck = 1). As can be seen, only for white students does "sense of competence" consistently predict attribution. This result lends credence to the Maehr & Nicholls (in press) suggestion that achievement is not pancutturally perceived as sense of competence.

The results in Tables 1, 2, & 3 also point to a prevalent sex difference x ethnicity interaction effect in predicting attributions. At fourth grade sex differences are predictive for American Indian students, at eighth grade for Oriental, and Black students, and at eleventh grade, for all but white students. (Note, positive weights indicate that within an ethnic group, that males make internal attributions, negative weights that females make internal attributions.)

Family density does not appear to have a prevasive effect upon attributions at any grade level. One might pre-suppose, following Zajone's (1975) theory, that with increasing number of "ability" (or even "effort") attributions. One might even expect the Zajonc's effect to be heightened for certain ethnic groups. However, it does not appear to be the case.

Furthermore, one might implicitly propose that internal attributions might be related to some form of "motivated behavior". That is, students who regularly experience success or enjoy academic activity (reading extra non-assigned books, going to public library, etc.) might be the students with effort attributions. However, the data clearly shows this linkage not be self-evident. Potentially, these divergent ethnic students may be not seeing the academic achieving students as purposeful (Maehr & Nicholls, in press) and thus the resultant non-linkage with the behavioral indicators of continuing motivation.

One predictor variable of interest is "parental communication". While the results in Tables 1, 2, & 3 in terms of within ethnic group prediction do not indicate straightforward interpretation, this variable will become important in discussing the discriminate analyses results between varying attributional groups within each ethnic group. It is to these results which are now turn.

Tables 4, 5, & 6 present the results of discriminate analyses between attributional groups but within each ethnic group: (Only those disseminate functions which were signficant within each ethnic group are given).

One overall result is the much clearer relationship between certain attribution and achievement. Several of these relationships do not seem to vary by ehtnic groups.

Thus, attributing to ability is related to test comfort and high sense of competence. Only for fourth grade Hispanic students is it tied to being from a small family. Attributing to effort is tied to high test performance and extra reading activity. Attributing to luck is linked to test axiety, low sense of competence, and lack of extra reading. This negative motivational syndrome unfortunately does not vary across ethnic groups. What is furthermore unfortunate is the fact that by and large it is the "luck" attribution which is most significantly given by American Indian, Black, and Hispanic students.

Summary

In conclusion, this research reviewed by this paper indicates that the origins of attributions vary by ethnic group memberships. Sex differences and perception of competence are differentially predictive of internal attributions for different ethnic groups. However, motivated behavior activities were not predictive, although this could be an artifact of perceived purposefulness of the task and achieving situation. Furthermore, family density did not mediate attributional patterns as could be supposed by some theory.

The consequents, however, of particular attributions appear consistent across ethnic group. (Thus, what determines attributions is moot ethnic group to ethnic group but the effect of a specific attribution are generalizable). Most disheartenting is the reliance of minority students upon the external attribution of "luck" for success.

These results argue for a more expanded framework for defining student motivation (cf. Fyans & Maehr, 1981) encompassing the factors both of sense of competence and perceived purposefulness. This latter variable will play a critical role in protraying and inferring motivational behavior. If the purposefulness and goals of students of divergent ethnic backgrounds can be ascertained, then programs such as attributional retraining, test taking training, and parental involvement regimes can be put in place to facilitate student achievement and competence.

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TABLE I

PREDICTION OF ATTRIBUTION

GRADE 4

	ORIENTAL	INDIAN	HISPANIC	BLACK	WHITE	OTHERS
SEX	-.11	.35	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.05
EXTRA SCHOOL READING	.23	.33	.10	.16	.05	.09
FREQUENCY READING MAGAZINES	.00	.13	-.15	.26	.04	-.10
USE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY	.11	.03	.05	-.02	-.02	.01
SENSE OF COMPETENCE	.20	-.02	.15	.04	.21	.13
PARENTAL COMMUNICATION	.00	.11	.03	.04	.05	.15
FAMILY GETS MAGAZINES REGULARLY	.05	-.09	.04	.00	-.01	.04
FAMILY DENSITY	-.13	-.10	.06	.03	-.02	.07
AGE	.02	.07	.03	.05	.02	-.03
FAMILY GETS NEWSPAPER	-.07	.06	.03	.00	-.06	-.07
	R=.38	R=.50	R=.22	R=.30	R=.26	R=.28

TABLE 2

PREDICTION OF ATTRIBUTION

GRADE 8

	ORIENTAL	INDIAN	BLACK	HISPANIC	WHITE	OTHERS
SEX	.13	.08	-.12	.04	-.06	.02
EXTRA SCHOOL READING	.07	-.10	.00	-.07	.10	.10
FREQUENCY READING MAGAZINES	.12	-.10	.00	-.15	.00	-.01
USE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY	-.22	.15	.02	-.29	.02	-.04
SENSE OF COMPETENCE	.01	.19	-.02	.27	.20	.17
PARENTAL COMMUNICATION	-.10	-.03	.13	.27	.10	.26
FAMILY GETS MAGAZINES REGULARLY	-.30	-.08	.03	-.04	-.02	.00
FAMILY DENSITY	.20	-.02	.05	.00	-.02	.10
AGE	-.08	-.13	-.07	-.05	.01	.00
FAMILY GETS NEWSPAPER	-.04	-.01	-.02	.09	-.01	.05
	R=.39	R=.32	R=.19	R=.48	R=.28	R=.37

TABLE 3

PREDICTION OF ATTRIBUTION

GRADE 11

	ORIENTAL	INDIAN	BLACK	HISPANIC	WHITE	OTHERS
SEX	.12	-.22	-.18	-.16	-.05	.04
EXTRA SCHOOL READING	.16	.31	.00	-.08	.04	.04
FREQUENCY READING MAGAZINES	.37	.24	.04	-.04	.00	-.30
USE OF PUBLIC LIBRARY	-.25	.06	.08	.00	.03	.17
SENSE OF COMPETENCE	.00	.01	-.03	.12	.25	.57
PARENTAL COMMUNICATION	.10	.25	-.03	.09	.08	.25
FAMILY GETS MAGAZINES REGULARLY	.04	.02	.12	.12	-.04	.02
FAMILY DENSITY	-.14	-.23	-.06	-.03	.02	-.22
AGE	.00	.02	.22	-.26	-.04	.02
FAMILY GETS NEWSPAPER	-.33	.10	.11	-.06	-.06	-.10
	R=.60	R=.50	R=.39	R=.32	R=.31	R=.66

TABLE 4

FOURTH GRADE SUCCESS ATTRIBUTIONS

ETHNICITY	ATTRIBUTIONS	CORRELATES
ORIENTAL	Luck	No Extra Reading
INDIAN	Luck	Test Anxious Lo Math Test Performance No Extra Reading
HISPANIC	Ability	I Read Better Than Others Test Comfortable Read Extra Books Everyday Only Child
BLACK	Effort	Hi Math Test Performance Test Comfortable
WHITE	Luck	Test Anxious I Read Worse Than Others Lo Reading Test Performance
	Effort	Hi Reading Test Performance Read Extra Books Everyday Talk To Parents Everyday

TABLE 5

EIGHTH GRADE SUCCESS ATTRIBUTIONS

ETHNICITY	ATTRIBUTIONS	CORRELATES
ORIENTAL	Effort	Read Extra Books Everyday Hi Continuing Motivation Hi Reading Test Performance
INDIAN	Luck	Test Anxious Lo Math Test Performance Lo Mothers Education Level
BLACK	Luck	Test Anxious Lo Reading Test Performance
HISPANIC	Luck	Lo Math Test Performance Read Worse Than Others Test Anxious
WHITE	Ability	Test Comfortable Hi Math Test Performance I Read Better Than Others
	Effort	Read Extra Books Everyday Talk To Parents Everyday

TABLE 6

ELEVENTH GRADE SUCCESS ATTRIBUTIONS

ETHNICITY	ATTRIBUTIONS	CORRELATES
ORIENTAL	Task Difficulty	Test Anxious Five Or More Children Lo Mothers Education
INDIAN	Effort	Hi Reading Test Performance Test Comfortable
HISPANIC	Ability	Test Comfortable Hi Reading Test Performance
BLACK	Luck	Lo Reading Test Performance Lo Math Test Performance
WHITE	Luck	Test Anxious Lo Math Test Performance Lo Reading Test Performance Five Or More Children
	Effort	Hi Continuing Motivation